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SUBJECT: EU WEIGHS ITS COUNTER-NARCOTICS EFFORTS IN BOLIVIA

REF: LA PAZ 1494

Classified By: Charge John Creamer, reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Our exchanges with European Union representatives and an EU working group paper underscore growing European recognition of the need for intensified cooperation on counter-narcotics in Bolivia. The Europeans note increases in coca production, fear the introduction of third country criminal organizations, and recognize the loss in GOB capabilities with the expulsion of DEA last year. Among proposals under consideration by the EU are increases in technical assistance and alternative development, development of EU member state law enforcement cooperation, better internal coordination, and strengthening CN cooperation with neighboring countries. EU officials are also keen to reopen the UNODC office in La Paz, and seek U.S. assistance in pressing the UN to do so quickly. Although EU counter-narcotics efforts have so far been relatively modest and focused on alternative development, EU officials generally share our assessments and are considering stepping up their engagement, including on law enforcement (by individual member states) and by pushing GOB reductions in coca cultivation. End summary.

¶2. (C) An internal policy paper prepared by the recently-formed EU Drugs Working Group (made up of representatives from local EU missions) highlights European concerns about the worsening counter-narcotics situation in Bolivia and the Europeans' interest in doing more. The EU paper notes the growth of cocaine use in Europe -- the ultimate destination for most Bolivian cocaine -- and the troubling increase in coca production in Bolivia and other Andean countries (the EU estimates 32-34,000 hectares under production in Bolivia, slightly higher than the UNODC's figure of 30,500). GOB efforts to control the legal coca market are seriously flawed, the EU notes, while Bolivian government interdiction remains hampered by the loss of DEA's logistical and intelligence support (following DEA's expulsion in November 2008). A major European concern -- also voiced by EU Ambassador Bell and others to the Charge -- is that Colombian and Mexican cartels will enter the Bolivian

market, expanding production and increasing trafficking-related violence.

¶3. (C) Amid sustained domestic pressure for increases in legal production, the EU has provided one million euros to fund a GOB survey of legal coca demand and other related studies (the "Comprehensive Study on the Coca Leaf in Bolivia"). Ambassador Bell explained that the full results of the legal demand survey will not be available before July 2010, although the GOB may attempt to revise its legislation governing legal production (including an increase from the current 12,000 hectares authorized) before then. Bell suggested that any estimate of 20,000 hectares or less should prove useful in pressing the GOB to cut coca cultivation. Separately, UK Ambassador Baker voiced disappointment that the study will not be ready until next summer, but stressed that the international community should not wait until then to press the Bolivians on this issue.

¶4. (C) EU officials acknowledge that their counter-narcotics assistance is small scale compared to the aid the U.S. has provided. According to their policy paper, most assistance has gone toward alternative development (the European Commission has provided nearly 50 million euros, Belgium and Spain several million euros each), with lesser amounts in equipment donations (the U.K. gave the GOB \$500,000 in forensics equipment this year; Germany and Italy have also provided small amounts of in-kind aid). The UK, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and France have provided limited CN training to Bolivian police in recent years. Ambassador Bell maintains that the EU cannot be involved directly in eradication, but allowed that some eradication-related aid may be possible (e.g., covering ancillary costs).

¶5. (C) More critically, Ambassador Bell noted, the EU lacks the capability to fill the law enforcement vacuum left by DEA's expulsion, but EU members states can and should be pressed to strengthen such cooperation, he said. The UK, Spanish and visiting Swedish ambassadors have all acknowledged privately that the EU's limited CN approach has proven insufficient and needs to be expanded to include direct support for law enforcement. Ambassador Baker reported that the UK is currently undergoing an internal review of its regional CN policy, to be completed by early December, that will include consideration of new efforts in this area. Additionally, the Europeans indicate that they intend to step up consultation with neighboring states such as Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina, which are strengthening their own cross-border counter-narcotics cooperation with the GOB.

¶6. (C) The EU's paper proposes a number of CN measures for the near term, including increased funding for technical assistance (e.g., on money laundering and judicial support), expansion of alternative development aid, and creation of mechanisms to aid the GOB in evaluating both its CN successes and shortcomings. The EU working group also identified as a priority better CN coordination, both internally and with other international partners. Ambassador Baker amplified that point, maintaining that a coordinated, united stance will be critical to overcoming Bolivian President Morales's apparent resistance to reversing the growth in coca cultivation. The Europeans also see the re-opening of the UNODC office in La Paz (closed for budgetary reasons) as key to strengthened coordination. Ambassador Bell reported that the EU has contributed 500,000 euros for UNODC projects and office funding and asked for U.S. help in pushing the UN to open the office as soon as possible. (Note: We understand from the UN that donor support will determine whether the UNODC can return.)

¶7. (C) Comment: We see a welcome evolution in the EU's approach toward counter-narcotics in Bolivia, as EU and EU member state officials evince recognition of the need to move beyond their relatively modest and narrowly-focused efforts to date. The Europeans may be convinced that Morales does not want Bolivia to be categorized as a narco-state, but they are also clear-eyed about GOB shortcomings (in terms of

political will, capabilities and corruption), and understand that the EU has to shoulder a greater share of the burden in confronting these challenges. With policy limitations on what the EU can do collectively, however, translating this recognition into concrete action will take time, as well as leadership from individual member states.

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